

**§ 122C-15. (This Article has a contingent effective date – see note) State/Local Consumer Advocate; authority to enter; communication with residents, clients, patients; review of records.**

(a) For purposes of this section, G.S. 122C-16 and G.S. 122C-17, "Consumer Advocate" means either the State Consumer Advocate or any Local Consumer Advocate.

(b) In performing the Consumer Advocate's duties, a Consumer Advocate shall have access at all times to any State or area facility and shall have reasonable access to any consumer or to an employee of a State or area facility. Entry and access to any consumer or to an employee shall be conducted in a manner that will not significantly disrupt the provision of services. If a facility requires visitor registration, then the Consumer Advocate shall register.

(c) In performing the Consumer Advocate's duties, a Consumer Advocate may communicate privately and confidentially with a consumer. A consumer shall not be compelled to communicate with a Consumer Advocate. When initiating communication, a Consumer Advocate shall inform the consumer of the Consumer Advocate's purpose and that a consumer may refuse to communicate with the Consumer Advocate. A Consumer Advocate also may communicate privately and confidentially with State and area facility employees in performing the Consumer Advocate's duties.

(d) Notwithstanding G.S. 8-53, G.S. 8-53.3, or any other law relating to confidentiality of communications involving a consumer, in the course of performing the Consumer Advocate's duties, the Consumer Advocate may access any information, whether recorded or not, concerning the admission, discharge, medication, treatment, medical condition, or history of any consumer to the extent permitted by federal law and regulations. Notwithstanding any State law pertaining to the privacy of personnel records, in the course of the Consumer Advocate's duties, the Consumer Advocate shall have access to personnel records of employees of State, area authority, or county program facilities. (2001-437, s. 2; 2002-126, s. 10.30; 2003-284, s. 10.10; 2005-276, s. 10.27.)